



www.aseasonofhappiness.com

When the Lights Go Out and Somebody's Home

what to do if the power goes off

Sometimes the electricity company gives notice when general maintenance or repairs necessitate cutting the power during business hours; so, with a few changes to routine, most families manage to cope until normal service resumes. Aside from a temporary inconvenience, little harm is done. Then there are those occasions when it just happens. If it's in the middle of the night when everyone's asleep, the only consequences might be that the electric alarm clock fails to go off when it's supposed to; or the DVD cancels, preventing the recording of an early-morning programme. That might cause a few grumbles from whomsoever was looking forward to watching it, but it's hardly a reason to panic. The story, however, is very different in the evening when everybody's home and doing really important stuff; then the individual reactions can tell their own sad tales.

The chicken pie has only been in the oven ten minutes and the resident the cook groans. Anyone watching the news on TV at the time finds themselves suddenly gazing in stunned silence at a blank screen. The younger members of the family might be doing their homework. Luckily, their parents can't see the grins of delight on their faces when the lights go out. It's a different story for any tertiary student plodding through an on-line psychology tutorial. If the laptop is being used, initially the battery will take over, so there are no major dramas with respect to the source of information; but if it's night-time, hand-written notes are a problem. For game-freaks strangling the X-box controller and barely holding their own against an onslaught of digital demons, the untimely power-out is the end of their virtual world!

Back in the real one, it is hardly disastrous, but electricity has been around so long that its benefits are taken for granted; and when it dies in an instant many are stranded in an unfamiliar void considerably darker than the twilight zone. Following individual spontaneous expressions of dismay there is a period of helplessness until someone says: "Where did we put the candles?" The search is on. Ghostly figures wander the house illuminating their way by the glow from mobile phone screens. The candles are eventually discovered in a drawer buried under a litter of coasters, table mats, napkins, a bundle of souvenir chopsticks and some bits that broke off various things and never got fixed - no matches though. They aren't really necessary in an all-electric home where nobody smokes. Well, one of the kids does, but they're never going to admit it. Then it is remembered that there's a lighter for the gas barbecue in the shed and also a flashlight in the car.

Twenty minutes later the family room and kitchen are bathed in the dingy flickering glow from candles. A quick check outside has confirmed that other houses in the street are in darkness, so a call is made to the electricity company. That's a long-winded affair because there's a queue, and after ten minutes of listening to a repetitive, annoying jingle it is realised that the mobile phone battery is dying. Of course, there is no means of re-charging until the power comes back on, something the kids definitely haven't thought about. They are on their iPhones, chatting, texting and playing games. Eventually an operator picks up and advises that engineers are on the job, but the fault will take at least three hours to fix. Under the circumstances, that sounds like a lifetime.

What to do? Ambient temperature may cause discomfort, seeing as there's no heating or cooling. Even the fans don't work. Should it be the height of summer, most will already be stripped down to the bare essentials which is fine when the air-conditioner works. Now the next best thing is to use magazines and paper plates as personal fans and try to avoid blowing the candles out. Winter time is a different story. Without heating the family will have to rug up in jumpers and dressing gowns. One of the youngest members has a smart idea of using a bed-spread as a cloak. The others catch on and soon a number of heavily padded monks are sitting in the gloom wondering how to pass the time.

This can seem interminable and is often very stressful; but it doesn't have to be. In fact, a power-out can be a blessing in disguise. Here's the ideal opportunity to delve into the past and revive some entertaining social skills driven almost to extinction by the progress of technology. Conversation for one - I mean REAL conversation like the kind people indulged in before texting. It may not be easy to begin with, talking about things other than work, school or what's in line for the weekend; but they would be a start. Extended to the latest movies, music, sports and the bizarre antics of politicians and media stars should raise a few laughs and lighten the mood.

Dad suggests: "How about playing a game like we used to?" The older kids groan. The youngest is more enthusiastic and accompanies him to the shed in search of the box where all the old games are buried. Once back in the house, the games are taken out one by one - Monopoly, Cluedo, Scrabble, Chinese Checkers, packs of cards and some dice. Surprisingly, these bring back memories even for the recalcitrants who suddenly find themselves secretly excited by the prospect, but are only prepared to concede that, for the sake of the family, they'll join in, if reluctantly; and definitely only until the power comes back on.

Particularly when the game hasn't been played for years, flickering candlelight is insufficient to read rules that nobody can remember. It's back to the shed for some form of auxiliary lighting. Mum is pleased initially, expecting to have use of the camping lantern which would have made preparing sandwiches a lot easier. Unfortunately, someone forgot to fill the gas bottle, so she has to make do with the dim glow from a kerosene lamp. There's another one on the dining table, along with a couple of citronella candles. Of course, these things should only be used outside because they give off toxic fumes, a fact quickly realised when eyes begin to stream and everyone starts coughing. What fun! Who's stupid idea was it to play games, anyway?

Despite feelings rising a little high, demonstrative displays of pique aren't as effective when facial expressions are almost impossible to see. Even the most belligerent can hardly blame anyone present for the predicament, and tempers cool quickly. Acceptance is the next stage. Aside from going to bed early, there's nothing more to do but make the best of it; and generally that's what happens. In the face of adversity when only the simpler things of life are all that remain, it eventually dawns how pleasurable they were and can be again. Maybe the family interaction and game-playing will be a one-off; or maybe it will continue for a while, then fall into disuse until the next power cut.

When that occurs, as it undoubtedly will, lessons already learned will be quickly remembered. Neither should the episode be as frustrating or shock-inducing, being forewarned and hopefully forearmed. Some family members may even welcome subsequent power failures. It is, however, extremely unlikely that anyone would suggest voluntarily spending an evening in the dark just talking and playing games, not if they didn't have to. Why not, though? Wasn't it fun, a bit of a laugh, different? Well, yes; but...

Still, I guess that's people for you.

For a look at some more informative articles on a variety of subjects just return to the webpage



Where every effort has been made to be accurate and fair-minded, comments and opinions expressed on this website are based on personal experience and do not necessarily reflect the views of the wider community or those groups and institutions mentioned. A Season of Happiness and its staff accept no responsibility for any outcome based on suggestions offered. What works for one may not work for others. Please bear this in mind.